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ABSTRACT

A systematic cultural plan applied to the second language textbook will not produce riches overnight, but it is a solid beginning that might be expanded when the teacher has the opportunity for further research or an increase in budget for the purchase of cultural modules. The key word in this proposal is "system." Teachers can, and do, add cultural comments on a hit and miss basis as they teach the language, but this is not enough for the student who is thoroughly grounded in his own cultural perspective and, more often than not, has well entrenched negative cultural stereotypes about the speakers of the language he is learning. Teaching a second language can be thought of in terms of three interrelated areas of communication: the speaker himself, the form of dialogue between two native speakers, and the way native speakers describe the world they live in. By applying anthropological insights into the concept of culture, a ten-theme system for developing the sociocultural context of a second language has been devised. The principal value of these sociocultural patterns is that they provide a systematic means for planning themes that can utilize the content presented in the standard language textbook and help to create the sociocultural context for teaching the language. (Author/CLK)

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BRINGING OUT CULTURAL CONTEXT FROM YOUR TEXTBOOK

The second language teacher has a cultural goldmine in the language he is teaching, but more often than not is as frustrated as a goldminer who knows he has a strike but has no tools to work it.

There are today a vast array of teaching aids available, ranging from cultural modules to specialized courses in sociocultural background. I do not wish to minimize the importance and usefulness of these aids, but we must acknowledge that to a large number of teachers in the field there is all too often neither the budget nor the time to supplement their classroom effort. Are these teachers to be excluded from the general imperative we all advocate of teaching the second language in its socio-cultural context? I do not think this need be the case. Armed with a competent textbook, a general background in the target group culture and, most important of all, a systematic set of tools, the teacher can begin to extract some of the cultural gold which has been there all along in the language he is teaching.

A systematic cultural plan applied to the second language textbook will not produce riches overnight, but it is a solid beginning which might be expanded in time as the teacher has the opportunity for further research or an increase in budget for the purchase of cultural modules.

The key word in my proposal is system. We all can --and do--add cultural comments on a hit and miss basis as we teach the language, but this is not enough for the student who is thoroughly grounded in his own cultural perspective and, more often than not, has well entrenched negative cultural stereotypes about the speakers of the language he is learning--French are refined dandies, Germans are hard working and unimaginative, Spaniards are proud and dogmatic, Italians are fun-loving and irresponsible, etc. We all have to combat these. But my point is that we do not stand a chance unless the student can be given a viable alternative to his preconceptions. The concept of integrated teaching is that the sociocultural context be given as the student learns the language and not later or on the side.

Let us think of teaching a second language in terms of three interrelated areas of communication. First, there is the speaker himself. He is the basis of the sociocultural context and the student must be introduced to Mr. or Miss native speaker. The second area of communication is the form of dialogue between two native speakers--the ways they address each other. The third is the way native speakers describe the world they live in.

In other words, the areas of communication I have been sketching are the personal, the interpersonal and the

social group view. Now then, you can quite rightly ask how these areas of communication are to be elicited from the standard language textbook. Let us take these areas in the order of first introduction in the classroom.

In the first area of communication we have identified the native speaker's total means of expression. Nostrand suggests that the student be allowed to see and hear how a native speaks and then be helped to note the significant characteristics that may have escaped his eye or ear. Since most language textbooks begin with instruction in pronunciation, the teacher only need supplement it with a kinesic guide for the target language speakers and thus use the sounds of the language to teach the full mode of personal expression.

The second area of communication we have identified is the interpersonal level which enters the classroom through the use of dialogue and general recitation. Nine out of ten textbooks in use today feature dialogue passages from the earliest chapters of instruction. There is, of course, a great diversity in the cultural content of the dialogues ranging from highly researched cultural scenes to a neutral use of key words.

A textbook which features concrete experiences of the foreign way of life, makes the teacher's task that much

easier, but not all textbooks are cultural equals. If the teacher is given a culturally integrated textbook he can concentrate on giving emphasis to those features in the dialogue which are most significant for the understanding of the target language speakers. But even in the lamentable case where a sterile textbook is in use we need not despair. The technique of role playing is most effective when used flexibly and imaginatively. A teacher who impresses on his students the need to understand the milieu of the target group as a necessary part of its social reality will be able to use role playing effectively. The essential objective is to have the students communicate not just through translated phrases but in other ways that involve interpersonal awareness within the target culture.

Let us consider how the teacher could adapt what I have called the sterile textbook for use in a second language classroom. Let us assume that the teacher is committed to the principle that a language is best taught in its sociocultural context. Let us further assume that the teacher has already passed through the first area of communication and has given the students some idea of the native speaker's mode of expression, gesture, body language, etc. and now is concerned with what I have called the second stage of communication or interpersonal communication.

There are five basic steps to be followed in the adaptation process.

1. The teacher must read the textbook thoroughly before planning the course and must take note of the dialogue patterns which are used in the textbook. The first step is one of matching the dialogues with real-life situations with cross-cultural content. For example, a simple fifteen-line dialogue about meeting someone at the airport can be adapted to demonstrate the encounter of the two cultural perspectives. Instead of Jack, it can be Juan or María who is arriving.

The teacher must supply the perspective of the Spanish speaking student. There are excellent books on this topic which are necessary supplements in cases where the teacher does not have sufficient target cultural exposure. Naturally, the students will respond from their own cultural perspective. The point here is that all dialogues must be made into situational dialogues. And the cultural context must be established through the use of language. As the student progresses the situation can become the target culture itself, i.e., Mexico, Colombia, Spain, etc.

2. The basic linguistic patterns must be related to the cultural background which stands behind the language. For example, let us say that the teacher is going through a structure drill using estar + present participle for -ar verbs. Instead of going through a sterile drill like: Estoy buscando un regalo he could have the drill use words with a high cultural content like Estoy buscando una piñata.

One may think that such a point is trivial, but such trivial matters if organized systematically can produce a certain cultural awareness in the students.

3. The teacher should get students involved in role playing as early as possible. At first through directed scripts with explicit stage directions, but later moving into creative role playing. By creative role playing I mean giving the students a summary of a situation and as much information about the target culture as is pertinent, together with the basic vocabulary which must be used, and allow them to make up their own dialogues.

4. Selected cultural reading in English should be used in full integration with the dialogues the teacher has in the textbook and which have been selected for cultural adaptation. Sometimes one feels the urge to assign a classic work of history or literature to the students in the hope that it will somehow arouse their

interest in the target culture. As valuable as these readings may be, they cannot perform the integrative function we are advocating. The readings of cultural context must be directly relevant to the ongoing project of the second language classroom.

5. As soon as the student is ready he should be introduced to brief passages of general standard Spanish on the contemporary topics which have been coming into the class through the language instruction. A subscription to the Sunday edition of a newspaper like Excelsior of Mexico is an inexpensive way of obtaining an abundance of material.

I would now like to turn to the third area of communication which I identified at the outset as the world view of the target language group. This aspect of the sociocultural context can best be presented through a series of themes organized carefully to demonstrate the sociocultural patterns of the target group.

Eventually the second language student should be introduced to problems of the target group, again through the patterns that are presented in the themes. It needs to be emphasized that whatever method is employed in second language teaching, and whatever level of linguistic competence is the objective, the language always entails content as well as form. The haphazard verbal kaleidoscope

that so many courses end up with shows that the teachers are often too intent on the linguistic patterns and have not paid sufficient attention to the content of the pattern. What I am advocating is that the language taught, Spanish in our case, should present a way of life as well as a mode of communication.

I would like to conclude with the enumeration of the ten basic patterns of living around which the themes of the third stage can be organized.

1. The interaction of the individual and society involves a sense of identification with his community, which may be defined by area, but also by religion, race, ethnic origins, economic status as well as level of education. This is a primary message system and all other systems have to be processed through this basic organizer.

2. The identification of territorial domain beyond the community involves ideas of areas and boundaries. The national territory imposes a pattern of response among some peoples and less among others, notable examples would be Mexican nationalism in contrast to Canadian localism. This system operates very strongly in political symbolism.

3. The sexual responses of individuals in the group involve biological as well as social relations. Thus there is a system of dress and comportment which

functions to signify attraction or repulsion of attention by the opposite sex; for example, the wearing of mourning clothes by married women in certain parts of the world has a primary message of repulsion to sexual advances. By association sexual symbols are also used in advertising.

4. The role played by the individual in the work force creates a message system of its own. The janitor who carries his lunch in a briefcase is an example of a reversal of signals. The priest, nurse or military man exercise this system by sending messages about their social status through their appearance.

5. Notions of time involve attitudes about sequence, cycles, the calendar and the clock. This system is the internal organizer of living for members of the group. Leisure time and retirement are problems in some groups because of the rigid time organization which cannot be easily altered.

6. The need for security involves formal and informal defense procedures. This system has psychological signals of fear and anxiety which find a marked difference in reception between urban and rural groups. Architecture and city planning are expressions of this system.

7. The recreation or play habits of the social group involve ideas of fun and national games. This system has many factors such as active versus passive participation signals for the individual. The vicarious identification with the athlete or cinema actor are strong factors in most contemporary social groups which are strong signals of the need for social prototypes.

8. The instruction-learning process involves attitudes toward the proper rearing of children, education and informal learning. This system of social interaction sends messages of social mobility and marginal attitudes.

9. The attitude towards technology and the use of the environment involves the group's ideas of material welfare. The demand for consumer goods is only the most visible part of this system which has produced a cocoon of material good for some social groups.

10. The last system is the means of problem-solving by the community. The individual has to react to stimuli coming from outside according to his psychological equipment. This system is at work at all times at all levels of interaction, but it becomes problematic when it fails for parts of the community and there is a recourse to violence.

The principal value of these sociocultural patterns is that they provide a systematic means for planning themes, themes which can utilize the content presented in the standard language textbook and help to create the socio-cultural context for teaching the language. I use the word help because in the last analysis the classroom situation is as effective as the teacher.

The perennial lament that cultural content is not available because the administration has chosen such and such a textbook is not valid. A few weeks of hard work in planning the introductory second language course can provide the teacher with an integrative approach which has as its main objective the teaching of language in its sociocultural context and, most important, as a system which once begun can be revised and improved each year.

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